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SHALL THE NATION TAKE THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW?

BY FRANCIS PERRY ELLIOTT.

It was John Quincy Adams who said: "Think of your forefathers! Think of your posterity!" But Tacitus said it also—and said it first—some seventeen hundred years before. It is the first part of the injunction that each emphasized, and, since Adams's day, it has grown from the common to commonplace for other Presidential aspirants, incumbents and saviors of their country to bestir our patriotism with similar admonitions. Probably never, though, until Mr. Roosevelt's occupation of the office, did we have a President who was so zealous an advocate, so earnest a pleader for *posterity*.

"You are mighty poor Americans," avows Mr. Roosevelt, "if your care for the well-being of this country is limited to hoping that that well-being will last out your own generation." And he sounds warning that commercial disaster to the whole country is inevitable unless our forests can be made ready to meet the vast demands accompanying our future growth; that consideration of the fact that we are actually near such a crisis—within one generation of it, under present conditions—is now confronting the nation.

The early leaning exhibited by the Father of his Country toward tree-chopping has been splendidly imitated by his posterity. The millions of flashing blades of axe and saw that superseded the "little hatchet" have been wielded bravely and overtime since his day. Instead of flaking a few chips from a cherry tree, we now manage to topple enough trees annually to make forty billion board feet of lumber. For our yearly fire-wood, we stack up 100,000,000 cords. Being great home-builders, our little item

for shingles and lathes is \$30,000,000. Our national barrel bill, represented by the same amount, is something shocking, considering that Kentucky is shown to be largely responsible for it. Another thirty-million expenditure goes into mine-timber, posts, poles and other products. Every time the second-hand of your watch steps around its little circle, our marvellous activities have consumed over 1,900 posts and poles; it surpasses a billion in a year. In the matter of telegraph and telephone poles alone, the number of trees that yield their bodies in yearly sacrifice for this lofty purpose is three and one-half million; enough, if set forty feet apart, to string a wire from North to South Pole and back again, or once around the world.

And this is only a beginning; for it is when we come to the railroads that we are stunned by magnitudes. They demand the product each year of nearly one million forest acres; in other words, the annual denuding of a forest area just equal to the space occupied by our twenty largest cities. Much of this lumber goes into rolling-stock, bridges, fence-posts and various building materials, but over half is required for the single item of cross-ties. We speak heartlessly of "Weary Willies counting cross-ties," without realizing the tragic magnitude involved in such a census; for the counting would total 620 millions of cross-ties in the vast mesh of our American railways; 118 million brand-new ones being required annually.

Did you ever get your mental fingers around the fact that the value of all manufactured products of the United States exceeds that of Great Britain and Ireland, Germany and France combined? It is really not easy to get a good grip on what this means, but when you do have it safely in hand—can feel the bigness, the weight of it—take note of the little detail that the one single item of lumber ranks fourth among all the industries going to sum up this colossal national pre-eminence. Foods, textiles, iron and lumber; these four, with their kindred products, are the only ones of all our manufactures that require more than nine figures to express the value of the output. This is convincing enough as to the magnitude of wood as a factor; it is tremendous, astonishing, satisfying. It is the kind of "thriller" the American business man delights in when he tilts with the British merchant abroad and diverts himself by taking twists in the Leonine tail.

But all of this magnificent enterprise with wood points to the cutting of a deal of timber; means the sacrifice of trees, world without end. When we say that last year, in the United States, we cut twenty-three billion cubic feet of wood, it simply means that we cut enough with which to make a solid, mountainous block or cube of wood very considerably over one-half mile high.

Oh! we have been going the pace—literally cutting a wide swath—with our timber inheritance! A little matter of 746 billion board feet since 1880; enough to make a ballroom floor one inch thick over 25,000 square miles of area. All the dancers in the world could gather thereon, for it would cover the States of Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island and Delaware. This means that in twenty-seven years we have used up an amount just equal to one-half of what was reported left standing at the last census (1900).

We have cut this timber because we needed it; and our activities and prosperity have absorbed it; and it would be all right if the increment of new timber kept pace with our cutting. But note the Government's official warning: "The present annual consumption of wood is from three to four times as great as the annual increment [growth] of our forest." If in 1900 we had about 1,400 billion feet left standing, what do you suppose we have to-day? In the twenty years previous to the last census, our population increased fifty-two per cent., but our cut of lumber increased ninety-four per cent. It seems certain that unless something is done, and done quickly, the wood-supply of this country will scarcely last out even another generation. "Twenty to thirty years" is the estimate given by ex-Chief Forester Pinchot, and this fiat gleams like red light athwart our way.

Thirty years! A treeless, woodless land in thirty years! Why, if we could believe or realize it, it would be appalling. Yet, if we were to begin reforesting our denuded country to-day, it would be one hundred and thirty years before the crop of trees would reach the average age of those which we cut for timber in the year 1909. These one hundred and thirty years-old trees which we are felling to-day were saplings when Germany, having squandered her forest domain, was in very much the condition we are now. At that time, when the smoke of the guns of the

"Minute Men" at Lexington still hovered on the edge of a Massachusetts forest, the Germans were bravely planting trees upon the sites their ancestors had cleared. And now, the trees that they planted are forests, carefully conserved; and that Massachusetts forest through which the Minute Men marched has long since passed away. In other words, in the whirligig of time we are where the Germans were one hundred and thirty years ago.

But in the matter of the forests, aside from the mere question of future timber provision, it is apparent that in most of the East and Middle West the process of denudation has about reached the extreme limit of prudence. The alarmed attention of thoughtful Easterners is being directed more and more every year to the unbalanced alterations of floods and droughts consequent upon the reckless spoliation of the timbered water-sheds and the consequent denuding of plateaus and slopes of their sponge-like, water-holding leaves, shrubs and grasses. The public has become educated to the fact that these things act as reservoirs, restraining and conserving the annual water-flow to springs and the tributary head-streams of rivers. We are beginning to understand pretty generally that, under the ideal condition, this flow is restrained and kept steady, permitting evaporation to proceed uniformly, with the result that rains minister seasonably to crops.

Not only this, but the humble service of the leaves and grasses helps to save something more precious, more essential to man than all the minerals yet unmined; this is the very bosom of Mother Earth itself—the soil. The fact of the abandonment of 1,000 worn-out farms in the State of New York made occasion two or three years ago for a foregathering at Syracuse to consider remedial measures. But westward, to the Mississippi Valley, farmers are uniformly confronted by the same calamitous wasting of soil tissue. We have reached a point now where American farmers are expending fifty-five millions a year on fertilizers, while our rivers are casting into the arms of the sea millions of tons of that precious transmuting powder that Nature, in her laboratory, has been ages in compounding. One river alone—the great Mississippi—expels into the Gulf every year enough silt to make a solid plateau 260 feet high with a base of one mile square; or expressed mathematically in other terms, a quantity of finely divided soil sufficient to plaster to the depth of one foot over 166 million acres of abandoned farms.

Are we going to be as penitent and wise as Germany, now that we have had our fling, or shall we continue to revel in our timber greed, "let posterity go hang"—as one lumber baron expresses it—and leave after us a legacy of naked hills scourged by torrential rains, valleys swept by Johnstown Floods, riverbeds choked with silt, with all the accompaniments of drought, deprivation for man and beast, famine and pestilence?

Conditions we find to-day in many older countries are prophetic of our fate. Long ago the French were sobered by some of these problems and passed restrictive laws governing tree-cutting upon both public and private domains. They have recently appropriated \$18,000,000 for more tree-planting, an amount equal to the damage wrought in four years by the floods of our own Ohio. China's civilization at the end of her 2,000 years is an object-lesson of hapless conditions peculiar to a treeless land. The Orient that we read of as once flowing with milk and honey is another deforested world that has had its day. Spain, once the granary of the world, is an agricultural wreck due to conditions which her statesmen ascribe to the destruction of her forests.

But in all the history of the world, no country has been so wantonly destructive of its forested area as our own. Fifty years ago, the Northeastern States furnished over half of the total lumber product of this country; to-day they furnish less than one-sixth. As for the Lake States, their product has been rapidly decreasing since 1890; that of the Southern States is now at its maximum with thirty-five per cent.; and now Forest-Inspector Kellogg points out that "the time of the ascendancy of the Pacific States is rapidly approaching." He adds significantly that "there will be no more shifting after the Pacific States take first place, since there is no new region of virgin timber to turn to."

Therefore, the West—the far West—is soon to be the last rallying-ground of the nation's timber reserve. Beyond the Rockies lie the grandest forests in the world. The one Pacific State of Oregon, alone, easily contains more timber than all of New England, with Ohio, New Jersey and little Delaware thrown in. And it is here in the far West that Uncle Sam owns that great domain called the Public Lands—a vast ramifying area withheld from the newer communities when they passed from Territories into States.

Rare indeed is the wealth of mineral deposits that Nature has hidden under the surface of our public lands. Some of the stores of recoverable coal seem almost inexhaustible. The coal lands of Routt County in Colorado which were withdrawn from entry by order of ex-President Roosevelt, are alone estimated to contain a volume of coal equal to all that the nation has burned up within the period of its existence. The ex-President's avowed purpose in temporarily withdrawing these coal lands from entry was not to rob the citizen of his heritage, but to prevent this wealth from passing into the hands of large private owners, as is the case in the East, and as, unhappily, has been the case with the timber wealth of almost the entire country; his purpose, expressed in his own words, is: "To get our people to look ahead, to exercise foresight, and to substitute a planned and orderly development of our resources in the place of a haphazard striving for immediate profit." Moreover, the ex-President reminded us that unorganized or mineral resources, once consumed, can never be replaced, such stores not being accumulative within the span of any nation's life. On the other hand, a timber stand, if properly administered, is like a well-regulated farm, and can be made to yield a product for a thousand years. At the end of this period, it should contain as many trees as the day the woodman's blade was first applied.

Among the "natural resources" belonging to the nation not the least in value is the grazing forage upon the open public domain—what we call the "range." Through Nature's mysterious processes, millions of tons of grass which otherwise would go to waste are every year converted into good beef, hides, mutton and wool for the feeding and clothing of the nation. Unlike trees, this forage is a surface product having only a brief and passing value; it is the gift of a year; a benison for to-day rather than for to-morrow.

Conservationists have had it urged upon them that the great Western ranges are being destroyed by over-grazing and that there should be some system of Federal control and a tax assessed for the grazing privilege. However, these warnings and recommendations seem to come almost entirely from large stockmen and forestry officials, for Western communities have uniformly protested against and repudiated the representations. In fact, to-day, the cattleman of large operations is, in the very letter

and meaning of the words, being forced "to seek fresh fields and pastures new." He urges that the remaining 300 million acres reserved for settlement be turned over to lessees for grazing purposes, under a system of Federal control through the Forestry Service. Under this plan, large operators in cattle and sheep would be able to fence up blocks of as much as 10,000 acres for periods of ten years. It would be a stockmen's empire, actually larger in extent than Great Britain and Ireland, the German Empire and France.

With our countrymen of the Rocky Mountain States, the homesteader has first consideration; like the ex-President, they are "for the settler—first, last and always for the settler." And it is the homesteader on the public lands who is steadily and surely contracting the borders of the mighty empire over which the picturesque "cowboy" and "cattle baron" so long have reigned supreme. It is not to be wondered at that the latter views with dismay the encroachments of the man with the hoe and the plough and deprecates the appropriation to agriculture of what had come to be regarded as a private reserve—a boundless, grassy sea, created especially for vast fleets and "outfits" of tawny cattle which for so long have swept the untrammelled range.

But any system which will permit the public lands to be fenced up will probably retard settlement and place an inhibition upon the development of the West. In the words of the "Denver Republican":

"Public lands should be held for people who will make homes and build up these commonwealths into great, prosperous, self-supporting members of the Union. To devote the range to lease-holders to be occupied by cattle and sheep would defeat this use; for, whatever might be said about the theoretical right to locate homesteads, every one knows that practically settlers would be excluded."

Lord Macaulay predicted that "the first great test of republican institutions will come to the United States coincidentally with exhaustion of the area of available free homes." Whatever prescience lies in this statement only Time can reveal, but the nice precision in the word "available" is significant. Since the United States went into the land business, more than two billion acres on this continent have been acquired for sale and disposal. All that we have left is a small remnant reserved for free homes for the settler. We have 168 million acres in national forests

and, exclusive of Alaska, an unappropriated domain of 386,873,787 acres. This is the last of the nation's public lands. The public lands have ever been a shining target for some adventurous game. Many are the schemes, deviously and adroitly disguised as enterprises for the public weal, which the Congress has had to resolutely confront and thwart in recent years. We have grown wise from sad experience in the past. The West need have no apprehension of the East in the matter of the conservation of our natural resources, nor need the East cherish apprehension that the West is not anxious and capable in conserving conditions for its citizens of to-day as well as posterity.

Western people are the only ones directly in touch with our national forests. They, more than all others in the land, are interested in preserving these forests for the purposes originally contemplated by the public and the Congress—namely, conservation of timber growth and the protection of watersheds. It is my observation in the West that this original purpose is universally popular among all classes; therefore it would seem that the real responsibility for success of the institution of National Forests rests mainly in wise *administration*.

Shall the nation take thought for the morrow?

There is more in the question than appears upon its face. Probably the *crux* of it lies in this: We must take thought for the morrow, but we must not shut the door of opportunity in the face of our countrymen and contemporaries of to-day; we must be careful not to place impediments in the way of the development of our younger States.

On the other hand, there can be no East against West, nor West against East, in a land that is facing a national disaster in the calamitous sweeping away of its forests. It is a time for mutual understandings, concessions and co-operation; the end being, that in that far-off to-morrow, our children's children may still rejoice to find that

“In the desert a fountain is springing;
In the wide waste there still is a tree.”

FRANCIS PERRY ELLIOTT.